



Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

Doctrinal Catechesis Sessions for adults based on
the Church Year, the Liturgy, & the Sunday Scriptures

Breaking Open the Word

by Mary Birmingham

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time A



Jesus Christ with Children by Carl Bloch, 1800's



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2.

Oblatio Sui

*Lord, take all my freedom.
Accept my memory,
my understanding,
And my entire will.
You have given me all that I have or hold dear.
I return it to you,
that it may be governed by your will.
Give me only your grace
and the gift of loving you,
And I will be rich enough;
I will ask for nothing more.
Amen.*

**Catholic
Faith, Life
& Creed**

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Breaking Open the
Word worksheets
connect with *Catholic
Faith, Life, & Creed*
Doctrinal Sessions.

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Liturgical Context

- ▶ We are now celebrating the Sundays of Ordinary Time.
- ▶ Today's liturgy exhorts us to make Christ the center of our lives.
- ▶ Christians will be given the strength to endure the cross insofar as they make Christ the center of their lives and have faith like that of a child.
- ▶ The Christian response to so great a gift is to extend that same love to others.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today's Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one of the readings.

First Reading: Zechariah 9: 9-10

- ▶ Today's reading from the prophet Zechariah echoes the advent of a future king.
- ▶ This king would mount a donkey and usher in the restoration of peace in the face of tyranny, cruelty, subjugation and devastation.
- ▶ The future king echoes the hopes of Israel for a return to a Davidic dynasty.
- ▶ The Old Testament image/metaphor of the warrior God is prevalent in today's reading.
- ▶ The warrior God comes to protect his people. The image is striking. Rather than riding a chariot of war this king mounts the back of a donkey bringing with him the restoration of peace and tranquility.
- ▶ Peace will reign supreme with the advent of this king.
- ▶ This model king will be the epitome of meekness and humility. He will stand righteous before God; he will uphold the Law and the covenant between God and God's people. He will faithfully lead God's people.
- ▶ A meek person according to the ancient Greek understanding of the word was a controlled, balanced person. A meek person controlled his emotions. A meek person controlled his environment and was open to God's wisdom and knowledge. Those who did not possess meekness were considered arrogant and ignorant.
- ▶ Disciples are called to meekness. They must be opened to God's healing and reconciling power. The meek are aware of their need before God and thus are open to receive God's healing and forgiveness. A person without meekness is arrogantly blind to their need for healing and forgiveness.
- ▶ Jesus, in his humility and meekness lived fully in accord with his Father's will.
- ▶ The meekness of the future king would rival the meekness of Moses, the meekest man of history.
- ▶ This king would acknowledge God's sovereignty over his life and his country. God would unite Israel, forging Judah and Israel once again into one nation.
- ▶ The future king's rule will be universal—extend to all peoples—Jews and gentiles alike.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story from his or her life.

- ▶ What is the Good News in this reading?
- ▶ Do you know anyone who possesses the qualities of meekness and humility? Describe the way in which they portray those qualities—the reason for your choice.
- ▶ Describe the meekness and humility that exist within you.
- ▶ What is this reading heralding for us?
- ▶ In what way is Jesus the realization of this prophecy? In what way did the people miss his true mission? How was his mission different from what they had expected? (It is important to note that Jesus’ mission was not to restore the Davidic, political dynasty, but to establish a kingdom of peace.)

Second Reading: Romans 8: 9, 11-13

- ▶ It is important to note that Paul is not referring to the body or carnal nature when speaking of *flesh*.
- ▶ *Flesh* refers to self-centered human nature.
- ▶ *Spirit* refers to human nature that is rooted in God.
- ▶ *Flesh* refers to human nature that is born into the human, sinful condition—thus a weak, sinful nature.
- ▶ Adam is our partner in this sinful state of being.
- ▶ Very often the word *flesh* has been so narrowly defined by Greek dualistic thought that all things carnal and having to do with the body are understood as evil. Such a notion is certainly not Paul’s understanding of the word.
- ▶ *Flesh* simply stated is sinful, human weakness into which we have all been thrust and which impacts our entire lives.
- ▶ *Flesh* refers to a propensity toward sin and death.
- ▶ When Paul uses the word *body* he is referring to the entire person—body, soul and spirit. Paul agrees that that the body can be adversely severely impacted by the power of sin but conversely it can also be redeemed by Christ.
- ▶ When Paul uses the term *spirit* he refers to human beings who have centered their lives on God.
- ▶ Even though human beings sin as Adam sinned, they are freed from being forever bound by that sin.
- ▶ The power of Christ’s resurrection has the power to free the sinner from the deadly chains that keep them bound.
- ▶ Faith, prayer and life in the Spirit free the sinner to break loose from those chains.

- ▶ The Spirit of God dwells within and thus transforms us into a child of God—a new creation in Christ.
- ▶ Such transformation empowers the disciple for service in the reign of God.
- ▶ We become who we were created to be—our authentic identity—when we live in God’s Spirit—when God becomes the center of our lives.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group. If time allows Catechist responds with a “brief” story or reflection from his or her life.

- ▶ How is this Good News for us today?
- ▶ Describe the way in which God is the center of your life.
- ▶ Have you ever experienced being freed from the power of sin in your life? If not, what would you imagine that experience to be? What are the implications?
- ▶ What evidence is there in your life that the Spirit of God indeed dwells within you?

Gospel: Matthew 11: 25-30

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

Gospel Exegesis

Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?
- ▶ In earlier verses Jesus challenged the arrogant, self-righteous and self-promoting people who refused to believe in what God was accomplishing through him.
- ▶ He accused them of lacking meekness and contrasted their lack of meekness with the meekness of children who easily acknowledged Jesus’ identity.
- ▶ Children possess the necessary innocence and purity of heart that it takes to make good and faithful disciples of the Lord.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites reflection on the following question:

- ▶ If Jesus insists that we must become like little children and have child-like faith [not childish] what are some qualities in yourself that you might consider to resemble “child-like faith”?
- ▶ Today’s scenario appears in both the Gospels of Luke and Matthew.
- ▶ The text reads as though St. John rather than the synoptic authors had written it.
- ▶ The *Father and Son* language echoes language that is common to the Fourth Gospel.
- ▶ Some scholars suggest it is a small fragment of a liturgy that heralded Jesus Christ, the source of all knowledge of God.
- ▶ There are also echoes of the wisdom literature of Sirach in the Old Testament.
- ▶ Jesus refers to God’s Wisdom. The text reflects an early Christology and Jesus’ own self-understanding.
- ▶ Matthew seeks to answer the proverbial Christological question: “Who is this man Jesus?”
- ▶ Matthew answers his own question. Jesus is the very *Wisdom of God* who has been revealed to the little ones.
- ▶ He has been revealed to the simple and hidden from those who think they are wise.
- ▶ The little ones are all those who believe that Jesus is the revelation of his Father to believers. He is the mirror of God.
- ▶ Jesus is God’s word spoken to reveal God to human beings.
- ▶ Jesus is the face of God; God’s own wisdom in the flesh.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites reflection on the following question:

- ▶ What does it mean to you when we say that Jesus is the Word that God speaks so believers will come to know who God is?
- ▶ What does it mean to you when we say that Jesus is the mirror of God?
- ▶ What does it mean to you when we say that Jesus is God’s wisdom?
- ▶ Is Jesus God’s mirror and God’s wisdom for you? Explain.

- ▶ Matthew's intention is polemic in nature. He is speaking to a primarily Jewish audience to show that Jesus is the long awaited Messiah.
- ▶ He is the personification of divine Wisdom from the Old Testament.
- ▶ Jesus supersedes the Torah, the prophets and Wisdom itself.
- ▶ Jesus manifests God's word to the world. He is greater than the Law itself.
- ▶ It takes a lifetime to plumb the depths of the mystery of Christ. It is an endeavor that requires child-like faith and trust in God's self-revelation.
- ▶ Jesus reached out to the *'am-ha aretz*, the people of the land—ordinary peasants, not members of the spiritual elite.
- ▶ The Pharisees considered them to be spiritually inferior. They were the object of scorn and derision.
- ▶ The burdens of every day life made it impossible for them to be as diligent in following the precepts of the Law.
- ▶ The Pharisees referred to the Law as a yoke—a burden to carry.
- ▶ Jesus encouraged the *'am-ha aretz* to take up Jesus as their yoke. His interpretation of the Torah was not a burden.
- ▶ Disciples must follow his example and learn from Jesus if they are sincere in their desire to know and follow the heart of the Law. Those who know love and follow Christ—who joins their lives to his life--will be assured the rest and peace that only God can give.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See appendix for an example.

- ▶ What are the primary themes in this Gospel?
- ▶ Matthew wants his readers to understand that Jesus is greater than everything they had previously put their faith in [for Jews it was the Law—the Hebrew Bible]. We are invited to put our faith in Jesus---to completely trust him no matter what---to completely believe that he is God and that he cares for our lives. Have you ever experienced Jesus in such a way?
- ▶ What would it take for you to completely abandon your life to Jesus' loving care—to completely relinquish control of your life to him? What obstacles might stand in the way?

Catechist invites participants to silently reflect on the following question.

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

Concluding Prayer

Repeat OPENING PRAYER for this session OR
Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97.

APPENDIX

- What would it take for you to completely abandon your life to Jesus' loving care—to completely relinquish control of your life to him? What obstacles might stand in the way?

When a person has a life-threatening illness he or she is forced to confront his or her life. He or she is forced to seriously assess his or her relationship with God—who God is and how God acts in his or her life. I have been thrust into this situation with the onset of serious kidney disease. I am presently awaiting a kidney transplant. My son has offered the gift of life and (God willing) will give me his kidney so I can live.

As my condition has worsened I spend more and more time each day responding to the above question. The gift of this illness is God's manifestation to me in the midst of it. I pray each day that God's will be done and yes for a positive outcome, but also for the grace to accept whatever comes. This past Lent has been a powerful reflection on the gift of life and my ongoing desire to relinquish control of my life to Christ. I treasure life; I treasure my family and friends yet I know that what Jesus asks of me is to abandon all of it and trust in him no matter the outcome.

The greatest obstacle is my own stubborn will. The antidote is prayer. Thus I spend more and more time asking God for the strength to accept whatever comes and to be ready to meet him in eternity if that is where all this is leading. I will fight for the gift of life to my last breath, but I am more confident than I have ever been that I am ready to meet him face to face. Such is the gift of GRACE and God's revelation through Christ.



Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Jesus Christ
Scripture and Revelation I or II
Incarnation
Life Issues

Baptism
Confirmation
Symbols of Bread and Wine
Eucharist Series

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

JESUS CHRIST

Zechariah prophesies that a future king will come riding on a donkey to bring peace and reign as Lord and King over the entire earth. This king would restore peace and justice. Matthew's intention in today's Gospel is to equate Jesus with the personification of Wisdom in the Old Testament. It is thus appropriate that today's doctrinal session focus on JESUS CHRIST.

SCRIPTURE AND REVELATION I or II

Zechariah prophesies that a future king would come riding on a donkey to bring peace and reign as Lord and King over the entire earth. This king would restore peace and justice. Matthew's intention in today's Gospel is to equate Jesus with the personification of Wisdom in the Old Testament. Jesus is the revelation of God. God reveals himself to us through his Son. He also reveals himself to us through Sacred Scripture. Matthew's primary thesis is to preach Jesus—the revelation of God. God speaks to us through his Word and reminds of us the God/human relationship since the beginning of time. Today's liturgy is an invitation to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about REVELATION.

INCARNATION

Today's liturgy points to the Son of God who took human flesh to save the world. Jesus is the future king prophesied in Zechariah. He is not the warrior king that was expected, but a humble servant who gave his life for the many. The entire liturgy points to the defining event in human history—the INCARNATION OF THE SON.

LIFE ISSUES

In today's liturgy Paul speaks of the body as the whole person. The body is subject to sin but also to redemption in Christ. As such he upholds the dignity of the human person. It is thus appropriate to focus our attention today on the dignity of the human person from womb to tomb. Today's doctrinal session will address what the Church teaches about LIFE ISSUES.

SACRAMENTS

Today's liturgy exalts Christ who is the revelation of God. Jesus continues to be present to us and reveal God to us through the sacraments. The Paschal Mystery is made present to us in every sacrament. It is thus appropriate that we focus our attention today on what the Church teaches us about SACRAMENTS.

BAPTISM

Matthew exalts Christ who is the Wisdom of God—the manifestation of the Father. We are anointed into the triune God through baptism. Christ is present to us in the sacraments and we are incorporated into his life through this sacrament. It is thus appropriate that we focus our doctrinal session today on the sacrament of BAPTISM.

CONFIRMATION

Matthew equates Jesus with the Wisdom of God found in the Old Testament. His abiding presence continues through God's Spirit in our lives. We are strengthened through the sacrament of confirmation to remain steadfast in our commitment to yield to the intimacy Christ invites with us each and every day. Confirmation seals us with God's Spirit who strengthens us for the Christian journey. Today's liturgy is an invitation to focus our attention on the sacrament of CONFIRMATION.

SYMBOLS OF BREAD AND WINE

In today's liturgy Matthew equates Jesus with the Wisdom of God found in the Old Testament. His abiding presence continues through the sacraments of the Church, especially the Eucharist which Augustine called the repeatable sacrament of initiation. Thus we will focus our attention on the symbols of the Eucharist—SYMBOLS OF BREAD AND WINE.

EUCCHARIST SERIES:

Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. Thus any Sunday would be an appropriate time to focus our attention on the Eucharistic liturgy. Today we will focus on part ____ of the Eucharistic Series.